

Calhoun and Branch ISDs and Area Districts Position Statement Mandatory High School Curriculum

December 2005 the State Board of Education (SBE) approved mandatory high school graduation requirements for all Michigan students. This recommendation will begin legislative dialogue re: statutory requirements to reflect the SBE position. The Board recommendation would require: four years of mathematics and English language arts, three years of science and social studies, two credits of world language and one credit each of health/physical education and visual/performing arts. Current law only requires one semester of civics of high school students.

Calhoun and Branch ISDs and area districts support this discussion about high school graduation requirements; the current mandate is woefully inadequate in preparing students for the world of work in the 21st Century. It is important to note, however, that area schools have long provided a rich core curriculum well above any state mandate and that area boards of education all have high expectations leading to a high school diploma.

The legislative discussion is important because it clearly demonstrates that education is central to the economic future of our state. The mandated curriculum would be expected for all students but would allow for individual and more differentiated instruction helping all students be successful in high school. We do believe, if these expectations for all students are directly linked to economic success, the **Legislature must increase the Compulsory Attendance Age to age 18 rather than 16**. State policy must reflect economic reality; no student can be economically independent without at least a high school diploma.

As we have reviewed the research, we must recognize that adding rigor and relevance to high school curriculum is really about Middle School Reform as much as High School Reform [W.K.K. Foundation Middle Start study; 2001]. In order for students to be successful in higher levels of math and science instruction, they must have a chance for a more challenging curriculum in Middle School. It is unrealistic to just expect freshman to all of a sudden be smarter in math and science. Further, course content expectations won't be finalized until well after the legislation is enacted. These are a couple of the reasons we believe **the phase-in should begin with 2006-07 Grade 6 students**. This will allow school districts to put in place the necessary High School Reforms in order to provide the Merit Curriculum for these students upon entry into high school. Finally, **adding rigor** to our current content expectations **does not mean that we just add significantly more content**; school districts are already making decisions about which learning must take place by Middle School and selective abandonment of some high school curriculum – we have to be sure what is required is realistic for all kids.

Research is clear that if content is the constant then time is the variable¹. Students struggling to meet rigorous content expectations must be given variable time structures in

¹ 2003 University of Tennessee, Dr. Bill Sanders – longitudinal study re: student achievement, teacher performance and assessment.

which to meet expectations. This is a time in Michigan policy where the state must reconsider instructional time requirements. **We strongly support reinstituting a minimum day requirement of 180 actual student instructional days with no less than 1,098 instructional hours.** The elimination of the day requirements has moved some school calendars to as few as 160 days with days longer than research supports as best practice. Further, the allowance to include professional development time toward meeting student instructional requirements has thus further reduced actual student instruction in many districts to well below the 1,098 even to 1,047 where Michigan was in 1999! We strongly recommend the elimination of this professional development waiver and that the **instructional time requirement be ACTUAL student instruction time.** We also recommend that the Department of Education amend the Michigan Accountability Workbook to allow for a **4 year as well as a 5 year cohort methodology** to determine high school graduation rates. Getting school calendars back to 180 days and beyond will take **additional resources**; we believe the **state** must make this a **priority**.

In order for students to experience and master the mandatory curriculum and to take their senior year of high school seriously, we must demonstrate that their final year of learning is critical to their overall education. Under current Michigan Accountability Workbook policy, students taking the Michigan Merit Test for the first time have that and only that score as a building and district indicator for Adequate Yearly Progress under NCLB. If a student is struggling with the Michigan Merit Curriculum and must take one or more courses for a second time to meet the end of course content expectations, they will most likely demonstrate those newly acquired skills on a Michigan Merit Test retake. We **strongly recommend that the state reverse its “First Test” policy** for measuring student achievement to a **“Best Test” policy** where the final retake or best test score is used as a measure of each student’s, each building’s and each district’s measure of NCLB and Adequate Yearly Progress.

In our research of labor economists, relatively the same percentages of jobs require a traditional Bachelor’s Degree as was required two decades ago. However, it is also clear that nearly all jobs require some post-secondary preparation. We don’t believe the preparation is universal to Algebra II, Physics, and Chemistry, however given the great diversity of work opportunities. The current SBE proposal does allow for a Senior Year differentiated instruction if a student cannot be successful in these courses. We believe that the **Department of Education should develop criteria** for this Year 4 option but that student selection and **program development is done at the local district level.**

If the State’s primary goal with the Merit Curriculum is to increase the number of high school students that are “college ready” and indeed go on to, and are successful in, college programs, then the 2005 research from the Manhattan Institute will be helpful in driving State policy decisions. Researching the national class of 2002 (most current data available), 34% of the students graduating had the requisite skills to be determined “college ready”. {This is a marked improvement over the last decade rising from 25% to 34 %}. This research also indicates that a large number of students capable of college level work are economically barred from college entrance. If Michigan is interested in accomplishing the goal of increasing the number of students successful in college, we

believe policy should not only attempt to narrow the skill gap between high school completion and college readiness, but also provide need-based funding for students demonstrating college readiness. This would mean that the **Merit Scholarships must be available for at least the first two years of a post-secondary preparation** program; not just a Baccalaureate program.

Research also indicates that students that cannot or will not complete a more rigorous curriculum will ultimately drop out of high school. **State policy must provide adequate resources to provide alternate methods and additional instructional time** for these students at risk of school failure to complete a traditional high school diploma. Several studies have concluded there is little difference in the long-term economic indicators between high school drop-outs and students achieving a General Equivalency Diploma; K-12 education must find a way to help these students achieve a High School diploma.

Finally, the data that is being gathered in Michigan and Ohio through the MSU and ISD PROM/SE (Promoting Rigorous Outcomes in Math and Science Education) program* is demonstrating four critical points:

- ✦ Enriching the high school curriculum must be lead by enriching the middle school curriculum – which demonstrates **Middle School Reform as a precursor**;
- ✦ Teachers must feel confident and competent in their instruction of math and science courses – which demonstrates **improvement in the pre-service preparation and post secondary preparation programs for teachers**;
- ✦ High schools must **collapse their curriculum offerings** – existing curriculum maps for math and science instructional offerings indicate it would be impossible to identify the individual grade level competencies in all the related courses taken by individual students
- ✦ Improved “college readiness” and mastery of richer math and science instruction is not simply about course offerings but about the **courses taken and successfully completed** by the majority of students

*PROM/SE is a National Science Foundation partnership project including MSU, Calhoun, Ingham and St. Clair ISDs and an educational consortium in Ohio.

We look forward to working with the Legislature to address some of our districts’ concerns including those mentioned above as well as the following:

- ▲ Providing our middle school students the appropriate curriculum that will prepare them for a much richer high school curriculum.²
- ▲ Providing rigorous **Career and Technical Education (CTE) that identifies the Course Content Expectations (CCEs)** for academic preparation in CTE and delivers

² 2001 W. K. Kellogg Foundation study of Lake Middle School’s collaboration with Mid South Middle Start relating to their middle grades educational reform model.

this content in compliance with No Child Left Behind Highly Qualified requirements.³

- ▲ Providing the **same rich curriculum for students with disabilities or at risk** through differentiated instruction; wherever appropriate (or in accordance with these students' IEP's) supporting these students needs within regular education in compliance with other legal requirements for such students - additional instructional time cannot be done at the expense of their time in the core curriculum.⁴
- ▲ Identifying the **integration of academics in all instruction** as well as the **business or 'world of work' application of all academic learning** so that instruction is relevant for all students.⁵
- ▲ Increased expectations or changes in the current system require that **all educational partners and stakeholders are actively involved in the support** for school districts and students. **Increased parental responsibility and/or involvement** will especially be key to ensuring that the new standards are reached.
- ▲ **Helping our communities understand** that, while the state mandate is raising the bar for all students, local school districts have offered rich curricula well beyond the current mandate.⁶
- ▲ Implementing the "**End of Course Exam**"; we believe that this should be **developed at a State level in line with the CCEs but administered at the local district level** (including delivering, scoring and weighting locally). This is the only way that Michigan can determine a comparable mastery of the Merit Curriculum. Further, this assessment instrument must be available prior to beginning instruction on that content so that teachers can use the assessment to inform instruction.⁷

³ 2004 Johns Hopkins University study examining three high schools' implementation processes and student achievement outcomes integrating career and technical education with their whole-school reform efforts.

⁴ 2005 Brown University study focusing on the organizational and professional conditions that impact middle grade reform with emphasis on adolescent literacy programs.

⁵ Ongoing research by Temple University informing educators about the successful integration of internships and field-based learning in secondary schools.

⁶ 2005-06 Carnegie Corporation evaluation of the Schools for a New Society (Arlington, VA Think Tank) theory that posits that high school reform will not successfully occur without strong district-community partnerships and the creation of a strong community demand for better schools.

⁷ 2000 Wiggins and McTighe – Principals of Backward Design; begin with the end in mind – the student goals and standards.